Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 19 Number 6 June 2022

FIELD TRIP: Sunday, 12th June 2022: Damagundam Reserve Forest, Vikarabad. Meeting Point: Hand Statue Circle (Morine Bakery), Mehdipatnam, 5.30AM; RBVRR Telangana State Police Academy, 6.00AM. Trip Coordinator: Sathwik Reddy (Mobile: 9985807186), Gokul Krishna (Mobile: 9945346585) or Srikanth Bhamidipati (Mobile: 9738840070).

The Damagundam Reserve Forest is a relatively under-explored hotspot, and has the potential to yield many interesting sightings. Last year it was in the news due to the sighting of the Blyth's Paradise-flycatcher. It hosts a large number of bird and mammal species, and this promises to be an interesting and productive outing.

This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and breakfast/snacks. Strict Covid protocols will be followed, so please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Members are requested to wear their Deccan Birders ID cards. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty.

Trip Report: Bhavnagar, Gujarat, March 11-12, 2022

Text & Photos: Sita Susarla

A scene at Bor Talav Lake

The city of Bhavnagar is situated on the south eastern tip of Saurashtra region of Gujarat state. A short trip to Bhavnagar came our way in the second week of March and though it was the fag end of winter, we thought we will make the trip anyway.

Before leaving we went through the checklists of birds at various places in Bhavnagar and decided to visit Bor Talav Lake, Velavadar National Park and Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary. The next step was to identify reliable guides who would show us around in the limited time that we had.

We came to know that a vagrant Red-breasted Goose was at Nalsarovar and were very keen to see it. We put up in a place very close to the Bor Talav Lake, also known as the Gowri-shankar Lake. The man-made lake, measuring 381 hectares in area, is home to many endemic and migratory birds. It is a scenic spot with a walkway on the bund and a pier stretching into the lake. Walking on the beautiful lake bund, we scanned the waters and, lo and behold, the first birds that came in our view were none other than the Great Crested Grebes that we had been trying hard to see without any luck for nearly two years!

Great Crested Grebe

The Great Crested Grebes were spotted along with Tufted Ducks, Eurasian Wigeons, Knob-billed Ducks, Eurasian Coots and Spot-billed Ducks. There were eight of them that we could count and, the lighting being perfect, we clicked some great pictures and videos. It took us quite a while to photograph them as they would dive under the water and surface in a completely new place!

Tufted Duck

Black-headed and Brown-headed Gulls

Whiskered Tern

Above us were flocks of Black-headed and Brown-headed Gulls and Whiskered Terns. At one point some people were seen feeding the gulls and terns; the birds were seen picking up this food and landing on the pier nearby.

All along the bund, there were hundreds of Yellow Wagtails in their breeding colors.

After a sumptuous lunch we went back to the lake to checklist the birds and to also see the sunset. There were three to four islets on the lake where the gulls settled down for roosting.

Montagu's Harrier

Early next morning we drove to the Velavadar National Park, which was just an hour's drive from Bhavnagar. Though the Montagu's and Pallid Harriers winter here in good numbers, the guide informed us that most of them had already left for their breeding grounds.

He, however, was keen on showing us the Indian Wolf, Striped Hyena and the Jungle Cat, besides some wetland birds. The 34 sq km park is home to the endangered Lesser Florican and its conservation, along with the conservation of the Indian Wolf and Blackbuck, is an ongoing program at the park.

Blackbuck

Indian Wolf

The Indian Wolves at Velavadar prey on Blackbuck in the park. The guide sighted one wolf that was in the open, and told us that it was preparing to hunt. It was exciting, as it was our first sighting of a wolf in the wild. Further on, we also spotted a Jungle Cat that was so well camouflaged that we could not have seen it but for the keen eyes of the guide.

Jungle Cat

The raptors in the grassland side of the park included two Short-toed Snake Eagles, one Montagu's Harrier, one Pallid Harrier, one Greater Spotted Eagle and two Marsh Harriers.

Demoiselle Crane

Great White Pelican

We then went on to the wetland side of the park and here we saw a huge flock of Demoiselle Cranes in all their grandeur. They landed at the waterbody in front of us, where the Greater Flamingos, Pied Avocets, Eurasian Spoonbills, Great White Pelicans and other waders were already foraging. Huge flocks of Demoiselle Cranes were also seen in flight moving to other areas in the park. The Great White Pelicans, on the other hand, were seen circling in the sky.

After a quick lunch we set off to Nalsarovar, which was more than 100 km away. The guide there was waiting for us and he took us around the wetland in a boat. It was a fascinating boat ride of almost 45 minutes gliding through the reeds with the atmosphere reverberating with various bird calls.

Red-breasted Goose and Bar-headed Goose

Finally, we arrived at the point where the Red-breasted Goose was present, and the boatman parked the boat noiselessly behind a patch of reeds. From here we could clearly see the goose. There it was, along with six Bar-headed Geese, foraging on the sandbar. It was an amazing view point and we watched the geese for a full five minutes before they flew away. The guide said that the goose had first visited Nalsarovar in January 2021, and was later also sighted at Little Rann of Kutch in November 2021.

As daylight began to fade, we began to row back. On the way we saw many Garganey, Green-winged Teals, Small Pratincole, Collared Pratincole, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwits, Northern Shovelers and Northern Pintails.

Collared Pratincole

Detailed bird lists from the various locations are given below:

Bird List - Bor Talav Lake, Bhavnagar					
Sl no	**Species Name**	**Scientific name**	**Sl no**	**Species Name**	**Scientific name**
1	Knob-billed Duck	*Sarkidiornis melanotos*	27	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*
2	Eurasian Wigeon	*Mareca penelope*	28	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
3	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	29	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*
4	Common Pochard	*Aythya ferina*	30	Great Egret	*Casmerodius albus*
5	Tufted Duck	*Aythya fuligula*	31	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
6	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	32	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*
7	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	33	Red-naped Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*
8	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	34	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*
9	Great Crested Grebe	*Podiceps cristatus*	35	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*
10	Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	*Columba livia*	36	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*
11	Red Collared Dove	*Streptopelia tranquebarica*	37	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
12	Laughing Dove	*Stigmatopelia senegalensis*	38	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
13	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	39	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
14	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	40	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
15	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	41	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
16	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	42	Blyth's Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus dumetorum*
17	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	43	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*
18	Pied Avocet	*Recurvirostra avosetta*	44	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
19	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	45	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
20	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	46	Bank Myna	*Acridotheres ginginianus*
21	Black-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*	47	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
22	Brown-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*	48	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
23	Whiskered Tern	*Chlidonias hybrida*	49	Western Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*
24	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	50	Citrine Wagtail	*Motacilla citreola*
25	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	51	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
26	Little Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax niger*			

Bird List - Velavadar National Park					
Sl no	**Species Name**	**Scientific name**	**Sl no**	**Species Name**	**Scientific name**
1	Northern Shoveler	*Anas clypeata*	26	Eurasian Spoonbill	*Platalea leucorodia*
2	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	27	Short-toed Snake Eagle	*Circaetus gallicus*
3	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	28	Greater Spotted Eagle	*Aquila clanga*
4	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	29	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*
5	Greater Flamingo	*Phoenicopterus roseus*	30	Pallid Harrier	*Circus macrourus*
6	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	31	Montagu's Harrier	*Circus pygargus*
7	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	32	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*
8	Eurasian Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	33	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
9	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio porphyrio*	34	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
10	Demoiselle Crane	*Grus virgo*	35	Eurasian Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*
11	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	36	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
12	Pied Avocet	*Recurvirostra avosetta*	37	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*
13	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	38	Rufous-tailed Lark	*Ammomanes phoenicura*
14	Black-tailed Godwit	*Limosa limosa*	39	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
15	Common Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*	40	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*
16	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	41	Clamorous Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus stentorius*
17	Little Coemorant	*Phalacrocorax niger*	42	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
18	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	43	White-eared Bulbul	*Pycnonotus leucotis*
19	Great White Pelican	*Pelacanus onocrotalus*	44	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*
20	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	45	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
21	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	46	Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus*
22	Great Egret	*Casmerodius albus*	47	Siberian Stonechat	*Saxicola maurus*
23	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	48	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
24	Western Reef Egret	*Egretta gularis*	49	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
25	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	50	Western Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*

Bird List - Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary					
Sl no	**Species Name**	**Scientific name**	**Sl no**	**Species Name**	**Scientific name**
1	Bar-headed Goose	*Anser indicus*	15	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*
2	Red-breasted Goose	*Branta ruficollis*	16	Marsh Sandpiper	*Tringa stagnatilis*
3	Northern Shoveler	*Anas clypeata*	17	Collared Pratincole	*Glareola pratincola*
4	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	18	Small Pratincole	*Glareola lactea*
5	Garganey	*Anas querquedula*	19	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
6	Green-winged Teal	*Anas crecca*	20	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
7	Laughing Dove	*Stigmatopelia senegalensis*	21	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*
8	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio porphyrio*	22	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*
9	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	23	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
10	Common Ringed Plover	*Charadrius hiaticula*	24	Clamorous Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus stentorius*
11	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*	25	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
12	Black-tailed Godwit	*Limosa limosa*	26	Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus*
13	Temminck's Stint	*Calidris temminckii*	27	Citrine Wagtail	*Motacilla citreola*
14	Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*	28	Dunlin	*Calidris alpina*

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Bird Humour

Umesh Mani

(From Instagram, November 16, 2021)

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)

Black-winged Stilt adult (L) (Gujarat, February 8, 2019) **and chick (R)** (Chennai, August 22, 2021)

Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Recurvirostridae
Genus: *Himantopus*
Species: *H. himantopus*
Size: 35-40 cm

Description & distribution: A very widely distributed member of the *Recurvirostridae* family of Avocets and Stilts, the Black-winged Stilt is an easily identifiable, very long-legged wader with black upperparts and long thin bill, white underparts, pink legs and deep red or reddish brown irises. The head and neck are primarily white with quite a marked variation in the amount of black or dusky grey on crown and mantle, between the subspecies as well as between summer and winter. The black wings may sometimes show a greenish gloss. Females are somewhat browner on the back, contrasting with black remiges. Immature birds are usually grey rather than black, with a sandy tone to the wings, and light feather fringes showing as a whitish line when in flight.

The Black-winged Stilt is distributed across most parts of the world, including Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, North and South America. The nominate subspecies, *H. h. himantopus*, is seen across Africa, Madagascar, Europe, central Asia, Russia, China, Mongolia, Taiwan, Indochina, South-east Asia, Borneo and Philippines; in India, it is seen in almost all the states except possibly the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

The other four subspecies are *H. h. leucocephalus*, seen in Sumatra, Java, New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand; *H. h. knudseni* of the Hawaiian islands; *H. h. melanurus* of South America, and *H. h. mexicanus*, seen in North America, parts of the Caribbean, and South America.

Habitat & behaviour: The Black-winged Stilt is usually found in scattered small to medium groups, in flooded tropical and subtropical grasslands, montane wetlands, coastal lagoons, marine, brackish and freshwater lakes, saltpans, tidal mudflats, estuaries, marshes, swamps, rivers, streams and creeks; also in irrigated or flooded agricultural lands, fish ponds and canals, up to about 4200m altitude. Usually seen walking gracefully and deliberately, its diet consists mainly of aquatic invertebrates, including fish, crustaceans, aquatic and terrestrial insects, molluscs, spiders, worms and amphibians, which it picks off the surface of the water, or by immersing its head and probing the shallow waters for prey; it may also occasionally take seeds from aquatic vegetation. Its flight is weak and involves fairly heavy flapping, with neck extended and legs trailing behind the tail, and the usual call is a squeaky, piping *chek chek chek* or *kwik kwik kwik*, uttered when alarmed and in flight.

Nesting: The breeding season of the Black-winged Stilt varies widely over its range. In India, the Black-winged Stilt breeds mainly from April to August, and the nest is a depression on the ground on the fringes of a lake, or a raised platform of pebbles or small stones in shallow water or amongst grass or sedge, lined with vegetable matter, soft reeds etc. It is also known to breed in large colonies, as sometimes seen in heronries. The usual clutch consists of 3-4 eggs, drab off-white or cream, with dense black blotches.

Local name: The Black-winged Stilt is known as *'Gaz paon'* or *'Gaj paon'* in Hindi and Gujarati, *'Pavalla kaal ullan'* or *'Paduva kali'* in Tamil, *'Pavizhakkali'* in Malayalam and *'Kalpaksh prawalpad'* in Sanskrit.

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